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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of the "user choice" approach to allocating public funds for training was examined through telephone interviews with 46 employers who were associated with 48 of Australia's 50 User Choice pilot projects (including employers associated with 7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives). The employers uniformly indicated very high levels of satisfaction with their training under the pre-User Choice arrangement, and at least one or two expressed doubts about the new arrangement. Technical and further education (TAFE)--sometimes in conjunction with enterprises' own training companies--was the provider most frequently used by respondents over the past 5 years. The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that choice of training providers was moderately or very important. Concern was expressed that the current trend toward amalgamation of TAFE might restrict enterprises' choice of training providers. The providers associated with the initiatives involving indigenous populations considered ability to customize training more important than choice of provider. (The report contains 17 references. Appended are a table summarizing the allocation of User Choice national project funds to Australia's states and territories and a table detailing the titles, clients, and providers of User Choice proposals by territory.) (MN)

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CEET

Working Paper No. 7

SURVEY OF USERS IN 1996 USER CHOICE PILOT PROJECTS

Joy Selby Smith, Chris Selby Smith and Fran Ferrier

November 1996

MONASH UNIVERSITY - ACER

CENTRE FOR THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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SURVEY OF USERS IN 1996 USER CHOICE PILOT PROJECTS

Joy Selby Smith, Chris Selby Smith and Fran Ferrier
November 1996

This Working Paper is substantially the report prepared by Joy Selby Smith Pty. Ltd. for the Australian National Training Authority and is published with their permission. The report to ANTA was prepared by a team which included two members of the Monash University-Australian Council for Educational Research Centre for the Economics of Education and Training.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In November 1995 the Australian National Training Authority's Ministerial Council (MINCO) agreed to the funding of a range of national projects for 1996 and authorised the Board of ANTA to allocate budgeted national project funds among them. These projects included trialing the "user choice" approach to the allocation of public funds for training. MINCO had already discussed the user choice concept at its May 1995 meeting and had agreed that user choice pilots be included in the 1996-97 State Training Profiles so that the user choice principles (agreed at the meeting), might be tested in all States and Territories and across a diverse range of industries. Subsequently, ANTA's Board agreed to the distribution of $7 million among States and Territories in support of the trial. The initiative, known as the 1996 User Choice National Project, involved the setting up of a series of user choice pilot programs around Australia. By mid-June 1996, 50 projects had been funded.

The User Choice National Project is jointly managed by ANTA and the State / Territory training authorities. The authorities forwarded pilot project proposals to ANTA early in 1996 and these were submitted to the ANTA Board for consideration in March. Formal notification of the first round of approvals was sent out by ANTA to the States and Territories later that month. Other submissions were received subsequently and these were approved progressively. Only after the first round of these processes were complete were project proponents formally notified by the State or Territory authority that their proposals would be funded and contracts could be exchanged. At mid-June, a number of pilots were yet to complete their initiation (to 'signing') phase. We have defined the phases of a pilot project as: initiation (to 'signing'); implementation; delivery; completion; and evaluation of outcomes.

1.2 Pre-Consultancy Phase

ANTA's CEOs' Committee had reached agreement in December 1995 on the allocation of the $7 million among States and Territories and on supporting administrative arrangements. Among other matters, the CEOs agreed that part of the reserve funds set aside to cover administrative cost would be used to undertake a national evaluation of the user choice pilots. The evaluation would be conducted in 1996 and its report would be ready for the MINCO meeting scheduled for November 1996. Calls for expressions of interest to undertake the evaluation were advertised in the national press in March.

In its consultancy brief ANTA specified that the evaluation report would include detailed findings and recommendations on the following:

- the extent to which the current pilots are effectively testing the user choice concept;
- the effectiveness of the user choice concept in achieving greater responsiveness of providers to the needs of clients; and
- policy options for future user choice activity.

ANTA expected those undertaking the evaluation to:

- access and analyse relevant reports, studies and evaluations undertaken on user choice pilot projects;
- evaluate a sample of pilots in every State and Territory;
- undertake consultations and surveys with a representative sample of stakeholders; and
- provide advice to ANTA on possible future directions for user choice activity.

The successful proposal was submitted by Joy Selby Smith Pty. Ltd. and included two members of the Monash University-Australian Council for Educational Research Centre for the Economics of Education and Training in the consultancy team. Our proposal suggested that the evaluation should be undertaken in two stages:

- the first would cover the initiation phase (to 'signing') of the pilot projects; and
- the second would provide an evaluation when outcomes were known.

We considered there would be benefit in evaluating the initiation phase of the pilot projects for early indications of the extent to which users value a greater ability to exercise choice and providers are able to be responsive. There is strong support in the evaluation literature for 'developmental' evaluations. A phased evaluation also would meet the concerns of those who were of the view that otherwise the full evaluation would be undertaken too early.

A full testing however, of the user choice concept through the pilot projects cannot be delivered until individual projects have reached completion. Only then are users able to compare *outcomes* with what would otherwise have happened. Hence the need for a second stage in the evaluation process.

1.3 Outline of Evaluation: Stage 1

ANTA accepted our proposals for a phased evaluation of the 1996 User Choice National Project. The first stage was to commence immediately after the signing of the contract on 30 April and be completed in September 1996. The second stage would begin towards the end of 1996 or early in 1997 and be completed by the end of March.

The first stage of the evaluation as proposed was to include:

- a survey of users associated with the various pilot projects to identify the importance of choice and the elements to which users give high priority when exercising choice in relation to their training needs (the subject of this Working Paper); and
- an issues paper which identified the main policy issues and concerns relating to the user choice concept and its implementation as indicated by the survey results, relevant literature and initial consultations with key stakeholders. This is the subject of CEET Working Paper No. 8.

In the event, the Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training in the new Howard Government announced plans to reform the apprenticeship and traineeship system with a strong emphasis on the incorporation of user choice principles; and ANTA asked that more emphasis be given to the policy issues and concerns associated with user choice and its implementation, and less attention be given to a literature review. In any case, a review of the literature had by then been included in the report, *Exercising User Choice* being prepared by Coopers and Lybrand for the Victorian Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE). The Interim Report on which this Working Paper is based was delivered to ANTA early in July.

2. THE PILOT PROJECTS

2.1 Introduction

In this second section of the report the fifty pilots that make up the 1996 User Choice National Project are described. In particular we describe:

- the distribution of pilots among States and Territories, their number and size;
- the national companies project; and

- the diversity of the pilots in terms of the type of training they offer, their circumstances, and the patterns of exchange negotiation.

2.2 Distribution of Projects among States and Territories

As at mid-June 1996, fifty pilot projects had been approved for funding under the 1996 User Choice National Project. It was expected that more projects would be approved in the near future. Forty one (41) of the 50 pilot projects were 'in situations where a contract of training already exists, that is for apprenticeships and traineeships'.

Nine (9) pilot projects are categorised as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) initiatives. It should be noted that two Victorian projects not categorised as ATSI initiatives are "specifically aimed at Aboriginal job seekers" or will be available "where trainees will preferably be of Aboriginal descent" (two of the three CareSkills pilot projects). In addition, one of the South Australian Traineeships being funded is described as a clerical processing (Aboriginal) traineeship. Survey responses indicate that some ATSI people are among the apprentices and trainees in other projects.[1]

The distribution of these pilot projects among States and Territories is given in Table 1.

Table 1 : 1996 User Choice Pilot Projects – Distribution by States and Territories (mid-June)

	Apprenticeship and Traineeships	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Initiatives	National Project	Total
N.S.W.	11		□	12
Victoria	8	5	□	14
Queensland	1			1
South Australia	1			1
Western Australia	7	1		8
Tasmania	4		□	5
Northern Territory		3	□	4
A.C.T.	8		□	9
Total	40	9		50

Note: Numbers given in the first column exclude the Pharmacy Guild of Australia's National Training Course in Pharmacy Assistants, the National Companies project.

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[1] Other access and equity target groups participate in certain pilots including in the ACTIV Industries pilot in WA and the National Training Course for Pharmacy Assistants.

The number of projects varies for two main reasons. First, the level of funds allocated varies between authorities; the more populous States and Territories receiving the greater share of the funding. State and Territories' allocation of User Choice National Projects is given in Appendix 1.

Secondly, the size of individual pilot projects varies significantly in terms of their level of funding. For example, Queensland has used its funding 'to supplement the budget for (Queensland's) Apprenticeship Training Pilot operation in second semester 1996'. This is recorded as one project. The South Australian proposal is directed at the recruitment of trainees in the State Public Sector during 1996. The proposal covers a number of traineeships but is also described as one project. Each of these projects absorbed their respective State's total User Choice funding allocation. On the other hand, there are a range of small projects for which funding is less than $50,000. Two projects received less than $10,000 each. By comparison, five pilot projects received funding of excess of $200,000 including the South Australian and Queensland projects. Table 2 shows the distribution of projects by varying levels of National project funding.

Table 2 : Distribution of Pilot Projects by Level of Funding

$	Number of Projects	National Companies Project
0 – 10,000	2	1
10,001 – 30,000	7	1
30,001 – 50,000	10	1
50,001 – 75,000	10	1
75,001 – 100,000	9	0
100,001 – 200,000	6	1
200,001 - 500,000	3	1
500,001 +	2	0
(N=49)		

Source: Developed from material provided to ANTA by State and Territory Training authorities.

2.3 National Companies Project

Included among the fifty funded pilots is a 'national companies' project. ANTA's Board is giving attention to increasing major national firms' participation in the Australian VET system and ANTA has established links with a number of them. ANTA therefore sought to include these type of firms in the user choice project. A number expressed interest but negotiations were concluded successfully only with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

The national companies' pilot is funded from the global allocation of the State or Territory for the User Choice National Project. Five authorities have committed user choice funds. There are no Australia-at-large funds so the proposed National Training Course for Pharmacy Assistants, provided nationally and delivered at branch level, might be regarded as five separate projects. This would not be the view of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia however, which managed negotiations with ANTA from national headquarters. We have treated the project as one pilot project, delivered in some individual States and Territories, but not in all.

2.4 Pilot Project Diversity

The pilot projects exhibit great diversity as to the **type of training** being offered (for example, in viticulture, stainless steel fabrication, hospitality etc.), and their **particular circumstances** (small firms, access and equity target groups, remote communities). Included among the pilots where there is a contract of training are the following:[2]

- The development of a traineeship in food processing (viticulture), put together by the Murrumbidgee College at Yanco in response to the needs of a number of mainly smaller vineyards where there has been no prior formal training experience. It is intended that the traineeship be registered nationally. An important element of the project is that industry specific modules are to be delivered at the work place by work place personnel whom the College will train as trainers and assessors. The College will also provide trainers for the core modules.
- A case where a large stainless steel fabricator servicing the needs of the internationally competitive food processing industry in central Victoria has moved their apprentices from one TAFE Institute to another 'because of the expertise and resources available in stainless steel fabrication'. The chosen provider has 'the capacity and expertise to customise the program to meet the specific needs' of the company.
- Another case where employers of automotive engine reconditioning apprentices currently send their apprentices to Sydney (from the ACT) to undertake off-the-job training. Employers are most unhappy with this arrangement and it acts as a major disincentive to employing more apprentices. Employers have proposed that the training be done in the ACT and be managed by Regional Group Training. Innovative on-the-job training arrangements, including sharing of resources and training facilities, are proposed.
- A training course to be delivered to persons with special needs in their work environment in Albany, Western Australia. It is proposed to combine on and off-the-job training within the workplace, with the content of the course being directly related to the work being undertaken. 'The proposal will not only provide information on the process of user choice as it relates to access but will also provide a unique opportunity to deliver meaningful training to a disadvantaged group of students'.

There are also a diverse range of ATSI initiatives. They include:

- Support for a Certificate in Koorie Education, Training and Employment National Skills modules. The Koorie Programs Unit of the Kangan Institute of TAFE (in the Western suburbs of Melbourne) has been nominated by Enmaraleek Association to provide customised training for ten of their employees. The training needs for prospective Enmaraleek students were determined in consultation with the Enmaraleek Association. It was decided that training was to be provided in the following areas deemed important to the daily operations of Enmaraleek Association:
  - work place communication;
  - office administration skills;
  - computer software applications; and
  - key aspects of relevant work place legislation e.g. Occupational Health and Safety and Equal Opportunity.
- A case where Aboriginal students in Northam, east of Perth, have requested access to an accredited Competency Based Training program written for Aboriginal people who work in schools which is currently only provided through Pundulmurra College at South Hedland in the State's North West. The course integrates on and off-the-job training and will provide trained persons to work with Aboriginal students in the local area. The proponent has indicated that the students involved have

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[2] The project descriptions in this section are drawn from submissions provided to ANTA by State and Territory training authorities.

chosen this provider in preference to Pundulmurra College because of the advantages of face-to-face delivery over distance learning arrangements and their family and cultural needs.

- The provision of a course in wild crocodile harvesting and egg/hatching care. It is argued that the Northern Territory crocodile industry has the potential to expand production five fold without depressing world prices. Currently the industry is handicapped by the limited number of hatchlings available to grow-out farms. This is because saltwater crocodile breeding in captivity has limited success. Consequently the expansion of the industry is reliant on wild egg collection and supply of hatchlings from those eggs. Several coastal Aboriginal communities are eager to become involved in egg collection, incubation and hatching.

  The new management program for crocodiles involves wild harvesting. Aboriginal communities are well placed to play a major role in this process. Harvesting crocodiles using a combination of traditional and modern methods has the potential to provide both efficient management of the natural resource as well as a source of employment and income.

  The Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation at Maningrida have reached agreement with a registered private provider to deliver selected modules from the Certificate in Crocodile Conservation, Management and Husbandry and the Certificate in Commercial Fishing (Deck hand) to 20 people.

A short description of each of the 50 pilot projects as provided by ANTA is given in Appendix 2.

The pilots also exhibit diversity in terms of the **negotiation of exchange** for training services between registered providers (on the supply side of the training market) and employers, communities and individuals themselves (on the demand side). Some exchanges are direct, between an employer (and the apprentice or trainee) and a registered provider. Others are facilitated by intermediaries, commonly referred to as 'brokers' who act to bring providers and users, either employers or individuals (or both) together, resulting in training which might not otherwise have taken place (i.e. exchange).

The distinguishing feature of a broker is the role they play in facilitating exchange, in this case causing training to happen. They are able to arrange exchanges because they can do it more efficiently and effectively than say, smaller firms and individuals. Smaller firms may find the costs of organising and negotiating training too high; for example, they may not be able to afford to carry an apprentice or trainee. Young people, particularly those who are unemployed, can find the 'costs' of job search, let alone finding an employer who will offer them training, daunting and demoralising.

The various parties in the training market can also combine roles:

- there are individual users who are also registered providers, as in the case of the Qantas and Coles Myer pilots;
- other users (employers) combine to establish their own industry training centres; and
- there are groups which play a brokering role and also act as providers, as in the case of certain ACT and other group training company pilots.[3]

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[3] Group training companies generally are not regarded as brokers, although they do play a brokering role as part of their activities. We found in our survey that the term broker is used in a very narrow context by employers.

Table 3 below indicates this diversity among the apprenticeship and traineeship pilot projects.

Table 3: Patterns of Exchange Negotiation: Apprenticeship and Traineeship Pilot Projects

	Number	Total
Direct Exchange of which:		15
• employer – TAFE or private provider	12	
• enterprise also registered provider	2	
• provider also enterprise	1	
Through intermediaries* of which:		26
• Group Training Company	11	
• industry training and skills centres	4	
• government	3	
• industry association	1	
• ITAB	1	
• Nettforce Company	6	
Total		41

* of these 26 intermediaries, 9 were also providers

Some user choice documents describe ATSI communities as "brokers". In fact, in some cases the community is the employer as, for example, in some cases in the Remote Area and Essential Services pilot project in the Northern Territory. In these cases the trainees are employed by their local community government councils. Based on the project details provided by States and Territories to ANTA it would appear that in at least three ATSI initiatives the community group is also the employer

Our expectation is that smaller firms and individuals would tend, disproportionately, to use the services of intermediaries to access training because for them the costs (broadly defined) are comparatively high relative to large firms. Inspection of the documentation provided in relation to each of the pilots tends to confirm this expectation. However, this situation does not always occur. Some larger enterprises participating in the pilots are involved through intermediaries, for example, Integral Energy.

It might also be expected that the category user/provider would be restricted to larger firms on the grounds that they have the capacity to provide and operate their own facilities. Again, this is not always the case. A feature of the traineeship in viticulture referred to above is that individual vignerons will be trained as trainers to provide modules on site.

2.5 "Rich" Data

Overall, the 50 pilot projects cannot be claimed to be statistically representative: the sample size is too small; the distribution geographically and among industries is not representative; and the process by which the 50 pilots were chosen was not statistically unbiased. It is apparent that speed was important and personal networks were significant in choosing the pilot projects. Nevertheless, taken together, the pilot projects illustrate the great diversity of training arrangements in which users and providers participate. The pilot projects provide "rich" data and a "good story". They allow important insights into aspects of the user choice concept and its effective implementation, as well as a better understanding of the parameters for any fully satisfactory statistical survey in future.

3. SURVEY OF USERS

3.1 Introduction

This section outlines how the survey of users has been conducted and reports its results. The section is organised in six parts:

- the target group 'users' are defined;
- the survey objectives are outlined;
- the methodology for the survey is described, including a discussion of how the ATSI initiatives are handled; and
- the survey respondents are identified.

Then follows:

- presentation of the results of the survey of apprenticeship and traineeship pilot projects; and
- presentation of the results of consultations with ATSI communities in relation to the ATSI initiatives.

For the purposes of this survey users are defined as employers in enterprises and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) communities. The National Strategy document (ANTA, 1994) identifies employers as the 'principal client' of the VET system. The brief from ANTA for the research project also describes user choice in terms of enterprises and ATSI communities.

Individuals as employees or students may also want to exercise greater choice about their own training, but practical considerations precluded their participation in this initial survey. Further, face-to-face discussion is considered to be a more appropriate way of learning about their views.

3.2 Survey Objectives

The user survey had a number of objectives:

- to establish the importance of choice and identify the elements to which users give priority when exercising choice in relation to their training needs (this is the primary objective);
- to familiarise the project team quickly with the full range of pilot projects, their widely varying circumstances, the background to their development, their intentions, and their state of progress at that time;
- to assist in the identification of policy issues for consideration by ANTA and State/Territory training authorities (and for follow up in the consultation phase of the evaluation); and
- to assist in the selection of the pilot projects to be the subject of more detailed analysis at a later stage.

3.3 Methodology

Details of each of the pilot projects provided by States and Territories to ANTA were made available to the project team. The wide diversity of the pilot projects was immediately apparent: it would be difficult for a mail-out questionnaire to be designed which would take this diversity into account and yet would not be off-putting to respondents, resulting in a low response rate. It was decided to carry out a telephone survey.

A telephone survey was considered to have a number of advantages for this evaluation.

- a skilled and knowledgeable interviewer could interact with respondents; an immediate 'feel' for the response and its quality could be gained;
- areas of concern could be probed, including whether issues are consistent or inconsistent across a range of respondents;
- points of interest could be expanded upon and respondents could introduce or elaborate on matters which they may not be willing or able to express in writing;
- the questions could be refined progressively as issues and areas of concern were identified; and
- telephone surveys generally can be undertaken fairly quickly; a high response rate is achievable; and they are cost effective.

However, some problems were foreseen:

- often it could be difficult to catch busy people. For this survey, three calls were made on average to each respondent and in one case, seven calls were made, all unsuccessful. Training is not always central to the activities of these busy people *"can't talk now, busy with a load of concrete"*;
- the interviewer would need to limit the length of the call (for this survey the length of calls usually ranged between 10-20 minutes, although some were longer); and
- whereas the telephone interviewer could probe, generally only qualitative details could be obtained. However, colourful and pithy quotes are the reward.

The professional interviewer who undertook the telephone survey reported that overall he found survey respondents to be "surprisingly responsive, much more than in other surveys in which I have participated". The interviewer considered the degree of responsiveness indicated a "strong interest in the user choice concept which respondents felt should be developed and refined regardless of the suitability of the particular pilot in which they are involved. Respondents appeared to treasure user choice".

3.3.1 ATSI Initiatives

There was one other consideration to be taken into account when administering telephone surveys from the point of view of this evaluation. Drawing on our previous experience with communities of Indigenous peoples we anticipated that a survey of this type would be inappropriate and ineffective in yielding the required information. The advice of others confirmed our view.

In considering the most appropriate survey method, our priority was to give Indigenous people the opportunity to speak freely, with confidence that their views would be respected. This could not be achieved without the development of a relationship of trust, and would be impossible if the communities were suspicious of our motives or our capacity to record and present their views without misinterpretation.

In this respect, a telephone survey was considered to have two main drawbacks: it lacked the capacity to facilitate the development of the necessary relationship between interviewer and interviewee; and its relatively tight structure of set questions, designed to enhance clarity and minimise misunderstanding, would not be sufficiently flexible. In addition, it was expected that telephone communication with some of the more remote communities might be difficult.

For these reasons it was decided to undertake the survey of ATSI initiatives separately, through a series of consultations conducted by a member of the team with professional interest and experience in training for access and equity target groups. The findings of these consultations are reported in section 3.6 below.

3.3.2 The Questionnaire

Given the scope of issues related to the user choice concept and the potential for other training reform agenda issues to overlap, together with the restricted time available for each interview, it was important that the questions put to users be highly focused. The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Program Evaluation Unit at the University of Melbourne, who also provided advice in relation to aspects of the interpretation and reporting of the results. Their assistance was greatly appreciated: any limitations, however, are the project team's responsibility. The questionnaire served as a guide for the telephone interviewer.

The questionnaire was formulated from knowledge of areas of interest and of concern to industry identified by ANTA and from the project team's own understanding of the issues. It was intended to identify employer participants for future consultations in terms of key variables selected *a priori* as likely to be significant mediators of the success and operation of the user choice concept.

Four sets of questions were included in the questionnaire:

- questions concerning users' experiences and satisfaction with training prior to their involvement in the user choice pilot project;
- questions directed at establishing the importance of choice to users and the elements of choice to which they assigned high priority;
- questions to identify the factors which constrain the exercise of choice; and
- questions directed at providing background information about the respondent's enterprise.

The questions were structured in such a way as to encourage respondents to express their own views spontaneously. Spontaneous responses can give an indication of strength of feeling on particular issues. Only after these were complete were respondents questioned about particular areas of interest which had not yet been covered. The questionnaire as a whole was also structured to assist in the flow of spontaneous responses. The questionnaire was pilot tested; some minor modifications resulted. It appeared from the subsequent responses that users generally considered the questionnaire covered major matters of concern to them.

The telephone survey questionnaire was also used as a resource in framing the questions which formed the basis of the consultations on ATSI initiatives. Broadly, this meant that the issues addressed by the telephone survey were also raised in the consultations. However, some changes were made. Certain elements of the questionnaire that were particularly relevant to training for Indigenous communities were expanded on in the consultations, in order to find out about the ways in which training programs had been customised to take account of the social, cultural and educational features of Indigenous communities. Some additional questions were also asked about the background of the pilot projects, the object and content of the training in order to determine the involvement of Indigenous people in creating the pilot projects and in shaping the training programs. As only one of the ATSI initiatives had actually delivered any training at the time the telephone questionnaire was undertaken, questions about participants' experience of this training could not be used. In addition, some questions that were of peripheral relevance, such as those based on an employer-employee relationship, were not always used.

3.4 The Respondents

Together, the project team and the interviewer made direct contact with all but two of the apprenticeship and traineeship pilots and ATSI initiatives.[4] Of the apprenticeship and traineeship pilots contacted, four were found to be under review and eight were not sufficiently advanced for employer-user participants to be identified and notified for the purposes of this survey. However, in six of these twelve pilot projects, intermediaries had been in discussions with potential employers as the pilots were being developed and implemented, and meaningful responses (in terms of the survey) were recorded: they were regarded as being within the scope of the survey and these responses have been included where appropriate, usually in the form of quotations. In such cases the quotations are separately identified.

It should be noted that in a number of instances more than one employer is associated with a given apprenticeship and traineeship pilot project. Interviews were not conducted with all employers in each of these cases. Rather, a 'representative' selection as proposed by the project proponent was contacted. Generally such responses were consistent within any one project. When analysing the responses we were mindful of this feature and were careful not to allow multiple responses associated with a particular pilot project to swamp the overall results.

In one pilot project with five individual respondents there was an unusual circumstance. The respondents belong to an organisation which has distributed operations nationally. They had used only their own company facilities but the training provided, though highly valued in the labour market, had not been accredited. It appeared that the user choice pilot was expected to allow the five respondents to transfer their in-house training, which apparently had been privately funded and privately provided, into the state provided and funded system. Nevertheless, the trainees would secure an accredited qualification.

These users uniformly indicated a very high level of satisfaction with their training under the pre-user choice arrangements; and at least one or two expressed doubts about the new arrangement. This is the only pilot project where such a pattern of responses was obtained. For this reason, in reporting the results we have treated them as 'missing internal data': that is, they were included in the scope of the survey; were interviewed and had responded; but their responses have not been included in the tabular material. Quotations from these users are identified with an asterisk.

In total, 46 separate interviews were conducted with people associated with apprenticeship and traineeship projects. This total included one interview with a person who had responsibility for three projects, and a second interview with a person who had responsibility for two projects.[5]

With regard to the ATSI initiatives contact of some type was made with eight of the nine projects and a total of nine consultations (eight formal and one informal) were held, yielding information about seven of the projects. The conduct of the consultations, and the groups consulted, were affected by three considerations. First, only one of the eight projects contacted had reached the stage where training was being delivered – delivery of the remaining projects being expected later in 1996. For this reason, it was not possible to seek information about participants' experience of the training. Instead it was decided that the consultations would focus on gaining background information about the projects,

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[4] For reasons beyond our control involving Federal-State relations it was not possible to make direct contact with three pilot projects in W.A. and contact with another pilot project in W.A. was discontinued.

[5] A number of other employers were also interviewed but it emerged they knew nothing of the user choice pilot project (*What pilot?*). Their responses have not been included.

particularly their objectives and the structure, content and mode of delivery of the training programs. This required some consultations with training providers and brokers.

Secondly, the short time frame allowed for the survey was insufficient for contacting many of the Indigenous communities and building the relationships with them that would give them the confidence to express their views freely to us. It was also too short for travel to the more distant communities. Thus it was decided that some initial consultations with community representatives would be held where possible, but most consultations would be conducted later in the year, when the training was in progress and participants would be in a better position to comment on it. Thirdly, some difficulties were experienced in contacting busy people, including some training providers, and some members of Indigenous communities.

Consultations were thus held with three representatives of Indigenous communities, five training providers and a training broker. For reasons of time or distance, three of these consultations were conducted by telephone, but followed the unstructured consultation format, rather than the structured telephone survey method. The remainder were face to face meetings.

We would not have been able to undertake the telephone survey without the full cooperation of the various State and Territory authority project officers or without the assistance of the pilot project contacts. The support of these people is gratefully acknowledged.

3.5 Results: Apprenticeship and Traineeship Pilot Projects

3.5.1 Respondent's Previous Experience with Training

Two questions were asked concerning users' experiences with apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements prior to their involvement in the user choice pilot projects. These questions were included to identify which sectors of the training market they had been associated with; and to gauge the strength of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with these arrangements. The degree of satisfaction would likely influence the level of acceptance of the user choice concept, it is argued. Spontaneous comments were first recorded; only after these were received were more specific issues probed where they had not been previously raised.

Training Providers Most Frequently Used

The training provider most frequently used by respondents over the last five years was TAFE, sometimes in conjunction with enterprises' own training companies, whether or not these were accredited facilities used to provide formal training, as defined. Group training companies and private providers were less frequently used.

Three smaller employers who had no prior involvement with training were among those who responded to this question.

Question: Over the last five years who has provided formal training for your apprentices and trainees?

Training Providers Previously Used

TAFE	28
Industry Skill Centre	–
Group Training Company	5
Private Provider	3
Own Company Facility	11
No previous experience with training	3
(N = 37)	

Satisfaction with Prior Training Experience

Users were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they had been with their previous formal training arrangements. In exploring these aspects four particular matters were under investigation:

- the level of satisfaction with training providers with whom the respondents had previously been involved;
- flexibility or inflexibility in relation to various aspects of training provision e.g. location, timing, course content, etc.;
- quality of training including feedback; and
- whether respondents saw it as important that training was kept confidential, given its potential importance for the competitive position of enterprises.

Unprompted, the responses were strongly negative, including their overall assessment of their satisfaction with the previous training provider (as noted above, this was normally TAFE). There was only one spontaneous response which indicated satisfaction with the previous provider and this was a TAFE college (provider/user). With regard to flexibility, the strongest area of discontent related to inflexibility in training courses in relation to the specific needs of the enterprise, and in the timing of such courses.

When **prompted responses** were included, the story changed to some extent. Respondents were about equally satisfied and dissatisfied with the previous training provider, with the tailoring of courses and with the extent to which on-the-job and off-the-job training were integrated. However, there remained a marked degree of dissatisfaction with the timing of training.

Also, when prompted responses were included, generally more respondents were satisfied than dissatisfied with the quality of training delivery; and equally satisfied and dissatisfied with quality of feedback, although those who were dissatisfied were very critical. The interviewer commented that many small enterprises had very low expectations of the training system being responsive to their needs.

Finally, it was of interest that respondents did not regard the need to keep training confidential as an issue. An explanation for this finding may be that apprenticeships and traineeships provide basic, entry level training, conferring only generic skills. Another explanation may be that few of the respondents operate in the internationally traded goods sector of the economy where confidentiality may be more significant for competitiveness.

Question: How satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with the formal training of your apprentices and trainees over the last five years or so?

Satisfaction with Prior Training Experience

	Unprompted		Including when prompted	
	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
The training provider(s)	1	7	13	11
Inflexible timing: eg time of year training is offered (peak season, off season); hours offered etc.	0	6	9	14
Inflexible: location of training (where training is held)	0	3	15	10
Inflexible: Tailoring of course to specific needs of firm (content)	0	9	11	14
Inflexible mode of delivery (eg lectures, computer based, distance)	0	3	14	6
Quality of training delivery	3	6	13	10
Quality of feedback	1	1	12	12
Need to keep training confidential for competitive purposes	0	0	14	6

(N = 28)

Some specific comments made to the interviewer in response to this question include:

On providers:

- *We were very dissatisfied. Specialist training was needed. We wanted written monthly evaluations. We wanted more control over what apprentices were doing. There was poor discipline. The colleges were not responsive to company needs (as compared to the TAFE institution with whom the company is now dealing).*
- *You have to fit in with what is offered.*
- *Dissatisfied: not professional, bad organisation, 100% lacking in everything; totally and thoroughly pissed off ... TAFE administration is ignorant and arrogant ... TAFE is totally bloody inflexible.*
- *Not dissatisfied (with prior training experience), but the new arrangements allow us to be much more flexible.*
- *Very satisfied* (a provider/user).
- *Been very satisfied. Prior experience with XXX was own training and was satisfied in all respects.* *
- *TAFE's purpose is providing skills for industry rather than giving a kid a job and keeping a teacher employed.*

On feedback:

- *Quality of feedback was very bad: one of our major problems. Students can be in need of remedial training, some students are not keeping up and we only get a report once a year.*
- *Quality of feedback was poor. TAFE was not willing to fix this, using 'computer difficulties' as the excuse.*

- *Feedback needs to be earlier and TAFE trainers need to have ownership and put more effort into training.*
- *Quality of feedback fairly poor for smaller employers but larger employers treated differently. This is one reason for forming a group training company, so we can leverage TAFE.*
- *Quality of feedback: the difference is that TAFE is bad and the private provider is good.*

On quality of training:

- *Very mediocre. There was poor flexibility in delivery and the quality of instructors wasn't up to scratch.*
- *Quality of training has varied, particularly with respect to part time trainers.*
- *TAFE unable to respond quickly to large jumps in training numbers, it takes up to 18 months to build up training skills; part time teachers vary greatly in quality.*
- *TAFE is a catch-22 situation; need to get a piece of paper; but the training is generally out of date and does not keep up with current trends.*
- *Important for TAFE establishment to keep up to date and in touch with all concerned. Very dissatisfied. Must let apprentice know how important it is to be best. This company does remedial training.*

On course content:

- *He went to tech and learnt a few things, but a lot not applicable to this trade.*
- *TAFE course must be able to relate to what is going on in the work situation.*

On block release:

- *They have to go off to TAFE on a specific day and I have my three apprentices all off at the same time. This is difficult in a kitchen.*
- *Half-way through a job and then has to go off (on block release).*

On lack of information:

- *Little information available; too many schemes, group training people send info. to companies; apart from that we don't get anything.*

3.5.2 Having and Making Choices in Training

Two central issues were investigated relevant to the operation of user choice at the enterprise level. First, do enterprises want to have a greater degree of choice in relation to their training arrangements and if so, in what areas? Secondly, do enterprises make choices when given the opportunity to do so and if so in what respect? Two core questions were formulated to get at these issues.

The Importance of Having Choice

The responses on this issue are very clear cut. Enterprises regard it as important or very important to be able to exercise choice in relation to all of the specific elements of choice identified in the survey. Enterprises also want to make choices in relation to more than these specific elements. They want choice of training provider.

It was put to us that negotiating specific elements of a training package could usually be undertaken satisfactorily **provided** the overall, ongoing relationship between the enterprise and the training provider is good. However, if the relationship is poor then the same choices in relation to specific elements are but second order issues (and often are less satisfactorily resolved or are not satisfactorily resolved at all).

Concern was expressed that the current trend towards amalgamation of TAFE institutions might restrict enterprises in their ability to make choices among training providers, particularly in non-metropolitan areas. Constraints on choice in markets where contestability is apparently relatively weak were keenly felt by some respondents.

Question: How important for your firm is it to have choices in training in the areas we have just discussed? I will read each item to you again and ask you to say whether it is very important, moderately important or not important.

Relative Importance of Different Elements of Choice

	Importance		
	Very	Moderately	Not
Choice of training provider (eg TAFE, private etc.)	23	11	3
Choice of timing: eg time of year training is offered (peak season, off season); hours offered etc.	28	5	6
Choice in location of training (whether on the job or off site college trade school)	19	15	4
Tailoring of course to specific needs of firm (content)	25	8	5
Choice for integrating on and off-the-job training	27	8	3
Choice in quality of training delivery (how good the teaching)	34	2	2
Choice in mode of training delivery: eg lectures, computer based, distance	10	16	5
Keeping training confidential for competitive purposes?	2	0	0

(N = 40)

Some specific comments made to the interviewer in response to this question include:

- *We want a competent and interested trainer; **then** we adjust access, timing, location, flexibility etc.*
- *Choice of training provider is important ..... In business today you have to be flexible; therefore you don't need an inflexible training system.*
- *Need to have face-to-face relationships with teacher.*
- *Could not cover absence of employee for ten days under block release alternative. More flexible delivery so does not have to go in one big block.*
- *We don't believe in block release : two days on and two days off.*
- *Have not seen evaluations from off-the-job. Trainee needs more on-job training.*

- *An important element of choice is the location of training. Training provider should be able to recognise the operational needs of the company.*
- *We take what we can get, but we are satisfied with what we get.*
- *Local TAFE is not good: apprentices need to go elsewhere which is much further away (travelling times, etc.).*
- *Training needs to be more practical: two hours theory to six hours practical.*
- *Only a small trade, so choice is not really an economic proposition. We need to have better liaison between TAFE, employers and textbook people.*
- *Training has to be married into our slack time.*
- *TAFE can't adjust to the little nuances we want in particular programs.*
- *Trainee should have front-of-house experience.*

Making choices

Enterprises did exercise their options to make choice about training when provided with the opportunity to do so through this pilot program. Choices were made both in relation to training provider and in relation to specific elements in the training arrangements which were the focus of the pilot. More than two-thirds of respondents reported they had changed their training provider.

In relation to each of the specific elements (except quality of training delivery) the majority of respondents decided to change their previous arrangements. Change occurred most frequently in relation to the timing of courses, location and tailoring the course to the specific needs of the company, and also in relation to the closer integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training.

The only case where the opportunity to make choices was not exercised at all was that of an employer which was also a TAFE college (a user/provider). In this case *"choice made no real difference. It was only a change in name"*.

Question: Is your user choice training similar to or different from previous training programs you have used for your apprentices and trainees?

Difference Between User Choice and Prior Training Programs

	Different	Same
Training provider (eg TAFE, private etc.)	20	8
Timing: eg time of year training is offered (peak season, off season); hours offered etc.	23	8
Location of training (whether on the job or off site, college trade school)	20	8
Tailoring of course to specific needs of firm (content)	24	7
Integrating on and off job training	19	10
Quality of training delivery (how good the teaching)	10	12
Mode of training delivery: e.g. lectures, computer based, distance	16	11

(N = 32)

Some specific comments made to the interviewer in response to this question include:

- *We were generally satisfied with our previous training programs, but user choice enables us to add extra in-house training, both for our own specialist needs and preliminary training.*
- *We value feed back, we have set up systems for feed back; we have market preview.*
- *A new program for shipbuilding.*
- *Training is more regulated and flexible, so they can organise their time better (than with former Skillshare: blocks).*
- *Practical classroom based training, which is totally geared to our needs. Terrific!*
- *In-house program is similar to that done privately but in more depth; better pitched to our special requirements and better timing arrangements.*
- *Would love to see more on-the-job training with a trainer-provider. This would give maximum value to all concerned. Current training can be slack: two days to do a two hour job.*
- *Better forms of notification for feedback being instituted. We had to request to get feedback at the other TAFE.*
- *The program is similar in that we are still using our own facilities, but we are using an interstate training provider who has the needed flexibility to provide satisfactory programs.*
- *We avoid duplication and can turn out a more productive trained person with better skills.*
- *Much more efficient for the in-house training to bring apprentices up to standard before they commence the TAFE courses.*
- *As far as XXX is concerned simply the same program as before but transferred to TAFE rather than company.* *
- *New system is not organised.* *
- *Very satisfied except for inflexibility.* *
- *Possibly leading to over education.* *
- *Going to trial ability to give more flexible provision so that trainees will not have to leave in-house situation.*
- *Will stress the need for discipline and every one knowing what the purpose of training is.*
- *Trainee appreciates having external contact and meeting for interchange of ideas. He's isolated on the farm and interaction is very good for his training.*
- *Differences : does not apply (!) Previously just XXX course, now put into the TAFE.* *
- *There has been a great need for a traineeship: previous labour market program a very unsatisfactory situation.*
- *Been very satisfied. Prior experience with XXX was own training and we were satisfied in all respects.* *

3.5.3 Other User Choice Issues

To ensure that no major aspects of the user choice pilot projects relating to importance, satisfaction and difference had been overlooked, we asked respondents three questions to establish whether there were any other aspects of choice important to them not yet covered.

Questions:

Are there any other aspects of training, which we haven't discussed so far, where it is important for your firm to be able to exercise choice?

Over the past five years, have you been satisfied or dissatisfied with this aspect of training?

Is the user choice program different from previous programs in providing this choice?

The users who answered this set of questions responded that the major areas of interest and concern had been addressed already. This was the overwhelming response. However, a number took the opportunity to raise issues of particular concern to them which did not always relate directly to the three questions given above, but were of significance in the context of user choice and often were of particular interest to that individual respondent.

Three large, relatively technology intensive enterprises competing directly on international markets made the following comments:

- *Companies involved in leading edge technology need to have access to training which is responsive to new innovations. The training has to be on-site when needed, with what is needed.*
- *Training is investment in an asset, which means you must be able to select from the best available.*
- *I am concerned about the training system's capacity to adjust quickly to major changes in demand in an area where specialised training is at a premium.*

A number of enterprises raised issues related to the quality of TAFE trainers and the need for changes in this area.

- *With the rapid change in competitive situations TAFE teachers need to be more aware and responsive to industry needs. This company is highly reliant on TAFE training and with the changes happening TAFE's need more resources to enable them to change their attitudes and make them more responsive [to industry needs].*
- *It is important that the provider keep up with what is happening.*
- *Industry needs better qualified people as teachers in TAFE, that is, people with sound industry experience.*

A number of employers stressed the importance of selecting their own trainees. Respondents who raised this matter saw themselves as trying to run the most efficient and competitive business possible. They did not see their role to be the pursuit of social objectives and a number expressed dissatisfaction with labour market programs.

- *I have been dissatisfied with my inability to have total control in the selection of trainees. I went to DEET and the CES and got poor results. I have been able to change this with the user choice program.*
- *Under this program I can pick my own trainees. I had difficulty with the long term unemployed [on labour market programs]. I am running a business. I'm not a social worker.*

Other employers saw the success or otherwise of training as being dependent on the trainees' approaches and attitudes.

- *A lot depends on the trainees' attitudes.*
- *Flexibility is important but it really gets down to the quality of the trainee.*

There were also some general comments on the value of the user choice concept.

- *User choice program needs to be developed further as this is a very important concept.*
- *How long funding is available is an issue.*
- *We are able to use user choice and send modules to other employees as a peripheral training. We are able to give training to all grades of staff, skilled and unskilled (because it is in-house and designed by themselves).*
- *We want to build up our own training centre to help us absorb peaks and troughs. It takes TAFE 12-18 months to build up their effectiveness.*

- *Government programs come and go too rapidly.*
- *Healthy competition allows providers to offer us much better services and meet our needs; we have an alternative and they know it, so they are prepared to adapt and be flexible.*
- *To get industry into training we have to offer them choices which are relevant to company needs.*
- *User choice has always been there if you could push it. This vehicle gives it a more formal aspect. People now realise that user choice is available and the problem now is to get them to think outside the box.*
- *Not 100% aware of what user choice program is. Have only received some generalities. I understand it is a more loosely based program which can be better suited to my company's needs.*

3.5.4 Barriers to Choice

The project team undertook to provide information to ANTA about the barriers and constraints users face which limit choices in training to suit the needs of their enterprise. Questions were asked about barriers in three areas: barriers associated with the operations of the training market (the limited number of providers, lack of information), market regulation (rules for apprenticeships and traineeships) and barriers related to the internal operations of enterprises (costs and management attitudes).

Employers had clear views with regard to barriers to choice in matters related to training. The limited number of providers and lack of information were cited as barriers, although with respect to information the same number did not regard it as a barrier. The time and cost of organising training specifically to meet enterprises' training needs was also cited as a barrier by about half the enterprises who responded. Rules relating to apprenticeships and traineeships and management attitudes were not seen as important by most of these respondents. Each of these potential barriers to choice in training applied to at least some enterprises.

Question: These are some statements people say limit choices in training to suit the needs of their firm. Please listen to each and say whether or not it applies to your firm.

Barriers to Choice

	Applies to Respondent's Firm		
	yes	**yes and no**	**no**
The rules for apprenticeships and traineeships limit choices	6	5	28
The limited number of providers limits choices	24	3	14
The time/cost of organising specific training for my firm limits choices	17	4	18
Management's attitudes limit choices	3	3	33
Lack of information required to make informed training choices is a limit	18	3	18

(N = 40)

It should be noted that the interviewer reported some difficulty with regard to aspects of this question and was concerned with the accuracy of some of the responses. For example, the large number of owner-operator enterprises, where the interviewer was speaking with the owner/manager, tended to result in a denial that the attitude of management could be a limiting factor in training choice. In addition, the interviewer was of the opinion that a number of enterprises were clearly uninformed of the range of options open to them, even though they reported that lack of information was not a barrier.

Some specific comments made to the interviewer in response to this question include:

On the limited number of providers:

- *In my specialised area and locality there is only one provider.* (Perhaps surprisingly, this comment was made by a large company based in a major capital city. Similar comments came from the ACT).
- *Limited number of providers. There are no good retail trainers. Other states can use private providers. There is no competition here between private providers!*
- *We would prefer expanded choice. We're worried that amalgamations may limit our ability to make choice.*
- *Private providers allow us to go to remote rural areas which we couldn't access with TAFE : their costs are too high, they are not flexible, they aren't geared to it.*

On lack of information:

- *Lots of qualifications which the chef doesn't have a clue what they mean; different certificates and trainers, too many to have any confidence in what standards are.*
- *TAFE should put out more on curriculum content to make choice. TAFE assumes retailing is all the same; we need some variation to get away from stereotype training programs.*
- *Lack of information is the main problem, but there is also lack of time to develop management training.*
- *Little information available; too many schemes, group training people provide information to companies; apart from that we don't get anything.*

On costs:

- *Cost of putting training together is a constraint.*
- *Main constraints are internal budgets.*
- *Major constraint is internal budget.*
- *Cost and time only a barrier if the client picks something out of the usual scope* (a user who is also a provider).

Other factors acting as constraints:

- *It comes back to the individual student and his attitudes.*
- *Biggest problem is white collar teachers who do not understand industry trying to organise teaching – people in the system not working for the system.*

Constraints relating to this particular pilot:

- *Rules of apprenticeship and traineeship a problem because only unemployed could get into the course and I would have liked existing employees to get on too.*
- *Would like to put existing employees through the same course, but this program was only available to unemployed persons.*
- *We only stumbled across this program by chance* (a very large employer with a large number of apprentices).

3.5.5 Brokers

Respondents were asked whether they had used a broker, 'someone who arranges training on your behalf with a training provider'. Only two respondents indicated they had. In fact, brokers – intermediaries between providers and users – are a feature of the majority of pilot projects. The telephone interviewer offered the interpretation that this pattern of responses reflects the view that a broker is perceived by users as a private company operating commercially for profit. "... *brokers ring to sell courses which we like. They provide information*". Government agencies, industry associations and training companies are not seen in the same light although they can act as brokers and often do.

3.5.6 State of Development of User Choice Training Programs at Time of Application for Pilot Funding

When this questionnaire was being formulated, we were interested to know about the processes associated with pilot project development. However, as the survey progressed, and as we became more informed through consultations and discussions, it became apparent that often the pilot projects were not developed as an immediate response to an advertisement or similar. Instead, many were an outcome of an overall and continuing relationship between the training provider and the enterprise.

One very large employer commented "its about responsibility, interface, sharing, all that development stuff. It's about a longer term relationship".

This view is supported by our finding that some two-thirds (24/38) of respondents reported that the project with which they were associated was either "up and running" or "being designed or developed" when user choice funding became available. Of course some of these projects were looking for funding from a range of possible funding sources or were happy to substitute user choice funding for other sources.

Nevertheless, a significant proportion of respondents reported that the user choice projects did not exist, as far as they were aware. A number of these initiatives were seen as being developed in response to the specific training needs of smaller enterprises (and were highly valued by them). The responses from smaller firms indicated that they felt keenly about the importance of user choice and were frustrated about previous arrangements which they saw as ignoring their particular interests and concerns.

Question: I'd like to ask about the background of the training program which is now receiving user choice pilot project funding; was it up and running at the time user choice funding became available; was the training program in the process of being designed or developed; or was there some other arrangement?

Project Status at Time of Funding

Up and running	18
Being designed or developed	9
Did not exist prior to user choice funding	14
Other	0
(N = 41)	

Some specific comments made to the interviewer in response to this question were:

- *This is a new program. The only thing available (previously) was on-the-job training.*
- *I have been trying to get an appropriate engineering building course up for a number of years. However, we are too small ... this industry would only be able to provide 4-5 trainees each year. The TAFE will only offer general training and not meet our specialised needs. User choice has enabled funding for our particular needs.*

3.6 Consultations on ATSI Initiatives – Findings

Of the eight ATSI initiatives that were contacted, only one was found to be in the process of delivering the training. In the other seven cases, plans were being made to deliver the training later in the year. This meant that it was not possible for the consultations to seek information about the experience of the training participants. Instead, they were re-focused on the gathering of some basic information about the development of the pilot project training programs from their inception until the time of the survey. As noted, a total of nine consultations were held, yielding information on seven pilot projects.

Questions used in the consultations raised the following issues: What was the objective of the pilot project? What were its origins – was it new or did it exist before the user choice pilot project? Why and how had the idea for the pilot project arisen? What had been the development process of the training program? To what extent had Indigenous communities been involved in the program's development? In what ways had the program been customised – content, mode and place of delivery, structure, assessment and pathways? What were the reasons for this customisation? And what problems or advantages had emerged so far?

Through discussion on these issues it was believed that it would be possible to determine the importance of choice to the Indigenous communities, and the nature of the choices they had been given, as well as discover some of the pitfalls and advantages of the user choice approach in the context of Indigenous communities.

3.6.1 The Objectives

All seven projects had clearly stated objectives that were presented as the product of negotiation and consultation between the communities and the training provider and/or broker. These objectives were of two kinds: specific and general.

The specific objectives for each project related to the characteristics of individual communities. Thus they were different for each project and for different communities even within the same project. They were usually connected with the geographical location of the community and the traditional skills of its members. General objectives were common to several projects. These were concerned with providing skills for employment and/or to improve community self-sufficiency.

Each project had specific objectives of its own, and general objectives shared with other projects. For instance, four of the projects shared the general objective of developing small business skills. However, the nature of the business venture and therefore of the particular skills required were different in each community, even within the same project and thus each project also had specific objectives relating to these skill needs.

3.6.2 Origins

All but one of the seven pilot projects were found to be new programs of training, that did not exist prior to the user choice pilots. However, in five of the other six cases, training had previously been provided for the community by the same training provider. In the remaining case, the training provider had been recommended and introduced by a respected and trusted intermediary.

The existence of established relationships between the communities and particular training providers or brokers seemed to play an important role in providing a base on which the pilot projects were built. Many of those consulted stressed the importance of this relationship, with one training provider commenting that it had taken five years to establish and that the user choice project would be unsuccessful without the effort that had gone into creating this infrastructure.

Discussions about the source of the idea for the training program yielded some ambiguous results. In five cases, it appeared initially that the training program had been created by a provider or broker in response to a need perceived by the community, but further probing suggested that training providers or brokers had played an important role in helping to identify, or clarify, this training need. In the other two cases it was not clear whether the community had perceived the need or it had been suggested to them.

In most cases, providers or brokers appeared to have been the driving force behind the establishment of the pilot project, rather than the communities. This reflected the way in which information was distributed about the availability of project funding – i.e. to providers, not communities. A common pattern emerged: a provider or broker received information about the project, the provider or broker then contacted a community with which they already had a relationship and together they negotiated a possible program. Only two cases were different. In the first, the community, a sophisticated urban group, had initiated contact with a training provider they had not used before; however a training broker played an important role in bringing the two together. In the second case, the provider sought project funding in order to extend the student contact hours in a training program that already existed and for which there was a high level of demand that could not be met due to lack of funding.

3.6.3 Development

Discussion of the development of the project centred on the question of the extent of involvement by the indigenous communities in the process of putting the training program together. In all of the seven projects, there was evidence of community involvement, though the extent of this involvement varied. In most cases, the provider or broker had identified key people in the community and negotiated the program with them, but in one case a committee had been established to put the training program together. It included community representatives.

Negotiations had dealt with questions such as: What should the objectives of the program be? How and what should be included in the training? Where, when and in what form should the training be delivered? How should students be assessed (and whether they should be assessed)? And what pathways should be provided into other courses? These negotiations led to significant levels of customisation in all cases.

In many cases, comments were made that development of the training program would be an ongoing process, even while the training was being delivered. If some things did not work well they would be changed or dropped – or new elements might be added. Among providers and communities there was a shared view that the project provided a means to try something new or different and see how it worked.

One provider pointed to difficulties in negotiation due to internal divisions in the community; however, the provider was confident that this problem would be resolved by the community and would not harm the project.

3.6.4 The Importance of Choice

Overall, both the training providers and brokers, and the communities, support the importance of choice, particularly with regard to customisation. From the point of view of the provider it is important to give the communities 'what they want' because if not, they will reject the training – 'they won't come'. From the point of view of the communities the user choice approach, as one person said, 'allows more diversity', is good because 'the customer is always right' and the training can be 'Koori-ised'.

Customisation

All seven of the pilot projects had been substantially customised to the training needs of the community. Customisation had included the content of the program, its mode and place of delivery and the way in which students would be assessed. Most of the programs had been put together by picking suitable modules from different programs and by adapting course materials so that they were more relevant to Indigenous experience. Much of the training was to be delivered within the communities and was to take workshop form, rather than using an expository model. Several comments were made about the need to take account of the mixed age range of the students and particularly of the importance of involving the community elders in delivering the training, so that younger members of the community might be encouraged to participate. About one training provider a community representative commented,' .... is very flexible ..... says Yes! The communities like her and what she's doing'.

Although training providers appeared on the whole very willing to customise, some expressed concern about constraints that limited the ways in which customisation could occur. Two constraints in particular were mentioned: competency standards; and set contact hours for some modules. Competency standards were said to be a problem because they are uniform and do not take into account the very mixed levels of skills with which the students begin the course. An approach was preferred that would take more account of individual progress. In one case, a provider commented that a computing class would include some students who had never touched a computer before and some others with substantial skills. The provider suggested that, for the students who began with extremely low skills, just being able to turn on the computer by the end of the course might be evidence of great progress, but they would not meet the competency standard.

Set contact hours presented two different problems. In some cases providers thought they were too few, given the low skill levels of the students and the need for them to achieve particular standards, but funding for additional hours could not be obtained. In other cases the number of hours was too high, as the students' ability to attend was restricted by other community commitments.

In one or two cases it appeared that, though the providers had supported and agreed to customisation, they were also attempting to exert some control over elements of the training, by including in it certain things they thought important, but which did not seem so important to the community. In one case, a community representative spoke glowingly of certain elements of the customisation, but when these were discussed with the provider their existence was denied. This provider had less experience than some of the others in working with Indigenous communities, and while keen to customise, did not always agree that there was a need to do so. Because the training had not been delivered this was not yet a problem, but it might prove so later.

Some providers and a community representative also expressed concern that too much customisation would be disadvantageous. It is important that the training programs offered are 'mainstream' and 'have somewhere to go'. In particular, it was noted that certificates that have the designation (Koori) are often regarded as second class and of little value in the labour market, because the skill levels are perceived as too low.

Choice of Provider

It was not clear from the consultations whether choice, when conceived as choice of provider, was as important as customisation. The way in which the pilot projects were put together and developed, with many providers acting as a driving force, meant that choice of provider was not a strong element. In addition, it appeared that the existence of established relationships between communities and training providers was an important factor in determining who would provide the training.

3.6.5 Conclusion

Prior to the user choice pilot projects there was already a recognition among training providers and brokers that Indigenous communities would reject training that was not relevant to their needs or experience. Some providers and communities had established relationships and some work had been done toward developing training programs and materials that were appropriate for particular communities. The projects presented an opportunity to boost this effort by providing additional funding.

The existence of relationships between some providers and communities meant that the concept of choice of provider was not well-tested in these pilot projects. On the other hand, there was extensive evidence of the other dimension of 'user choice' – customisation.

It is possible that where Indigenous communities are concerned, one dimension of 'choice' – customisation – might be more important than the other – choice of provider. However, the data is insufficient to draw a firm conclusion on this point at the current stage of the evaluation.

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Appendix 1: Allocation of User Choice National Project Funds to the States and Territories

State/Territory	Total $
NSW	1,753,400
Victoria	1,317,330
Queensland	1,100,000
South Australia	652,535
Western Australia	449,246
Tasmania	302,500
Northern Territory	296,790

Source: Data provided by ANTA.

Appendix 2: Summary of User Choice Proposals

NSW

No.	Title	Client	Provider
1	*Apprenticeships*(x3) Aircraft Maintenance Engineer(AME) • Mechanical • Structural • Avionics	*Employer* – Qantas Airways Pty Ltd	Qantas Airways Pty Ltd
2	*Traineeship* – Certificate 1-3 Retail Community Pharmacy Operations	*Broker* – Pharmacy Guild of Australia	Pharmacy Guild of Australia – where they are registered
3	*Traineeship* – Driller's Assistant Traineeship	*Employer* – Pontil Pty Ltd	TAFE NSW – Dubbo College
4	*Traineeship* – Certificate in Food Retailing (McDonalds)	*Employer* – McDonalds Franchise Operators	Western Institute of TAFE, NSW
5	*Traineeship* – National Rural Skills Traineeship	*Broker* – NSW Farmer's Association	CB Alexander Agricultural College
6	*Traineeship (x4)* – • Foundation Engineering • Engineering • Advanced Engineering • Engineering Technician	*Broker* – JOBSKO	TAFE NSW
7	*Traineeship* – Butcher Traineeship	*Broker* – Retail Group Training and Employment Ltd (employers using the package will be Coles Myers, Woolworths, and Franklins)	NSW TAFE Commission
8	*Traineeship* – Certificate in Office Skills – General Office	Employer – Broken Hill College of TAFE • Far West Health Service • Broken Hill College	Western Institute of TAFE – Broken Hill College
9	*Traineeship* – Certificate 2 in Food Processing (Wine Operations – Viticulture)	*Broker* – NSW Agriculture, Yanco Agricultural Institute *Employer – Riverina Group Training*	NSW Agriculture, Yanco Agriculture Institute

10	*Apprenticeship* – Certificate 2 in Electrical Trades *Traineeship* – Certificate 2 in Electrical trades	*Employer* – Electrotechnology Industry Group Training Company Ltd.	Australian Electrotechnology Industry Training Centre Ltd
11	*Apprenticeship* – Certificate 3 – Commercial Cookery	*Employer/Broker* – The Hospitality Training Company	The Hospitality Training Company Australia
Proposals included if sufficient funds			
12	*Apprenticeship* – Electrical Fitter Mechanic *Traineeship* – Electrotechnology	*Employer* – Integral Energy / Prospect Electricity	Mount Druitt College of TAFE, NSW

VICTORIA

No.	Title	Client	Provider
1	*Traineeship* – Certificate in Engineering	*Employer* – Transfield Defence Systems Pty Ltd	Victoria University of Technology (TAFE Division)
2	*Traineeship* – Certificate in Engineering	*Employer* – Byford Fabrication Pty Ltd	Wodonga Institute of TAFE
3	*Apprenticeship* – Certificate 111 in Textile Mechanics (modules)	*Employers* – Macquarie Textiles Bruck Textiles Pty Ltd Yakka – Wodonga Country Spinners	Wodonga Institute of TAFE
4	*Traineeship* – Home and Community Care	*Broker of training* – Careskills – Community Services and Health Industry Training Company	Several registered providers identified: • Royal Melbourne Institute of Tech • East Gippsland Institute of TAFE • Western Metropolitan Inst. of TAFE • Sunraysia Inst. of TAFE
5	*Traineeship* – Personal Care Worker	*Broker of training* – Careskills	as above
6	*Traineeship* – Child Care	*Broker of training* – Careskills	as above
7	*Traineeship* – Certificate 11 in Arts (Interactive Multimedia) industries	*Broker of training* – TEAME	Registration for scope of provision is presently being negotiated with the following organisations – • Public Radio News • Holmesglen TAFE • Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology • Regional TAFE Colleges

8	*Traineeship* – Certificate 2 in Media Journalism	*Broker of training* – TEAME – Training and Employment for Arts Media and Entertainment Company Ltd.	as above
9	*ATSI Initiative* – Certificate in Office Administration	*Community group* – Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI)	RMIT (TAFE)
10	*ATSI Initiative* – Certificate 3 Small Business Management (modules)	*Community group* – Coranderrk Aboriginal Co-operative	Outer Eastern Institute of TAFE
11	*ATSI Initiative* – Certificate of Video Production	*Community group* – Koori Arts Collective	Open Channel Co-operative
12	*ATSI Initiative* – Certificate in Koorie Education, Training and Employment (national modules)	*Community group and employer* – Enmaraleek Association Inc.	Kangan Institute of TAFE
13	*ATSI Initiative* –	*Community group* – Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI)	Melbourne Institute of Textiles
14	*Traineeship* – National Training Course for Pharmacy Assistants	*Broker of training* – Pharmacy Guild of Australia	Pharmacy Guild of Australia

TASMANIA

No.	Title	Client	Provider
	Small Enterprise Project		
1 2	*Traineeship* – Office Skills Traineeships and *Traineeship* – Retail Operators CST (sales)	*Employer* – individual enterprises to be identified throughout pilot project	To be selected by enterprises through a 'User Choice Notification' form
	Large Enterprise Project		
3	*Apprenticeship* – Aluminium Fabrication (Trade)	*Employer* – INCAT Tasmania Pty Ltd	Hobart Institute of TAFE
4	*Traineeship* – Retail Operations CST	*Employer* – Coles/Myer Ltd	Coles/Myer Ltd
5	*Traineeship* – Pharmacy Assistants (Distance Learning) Traineeship	*Broker* – Pharmacy Guild of Australia, National Secretariat	Pharmacy Guild of Australia

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

No.	Title	Client/Broker of Training	Training Provider
1	Traineeship – Retail *Traineeship* in Fashion	*Broker of training* – Business Skills Centre (BSC) (for Katies, Hiltons, Sussans, Millers of Manuka, Nunis, Emporio, and Suzanne Gray)	BSC
2	*Apprenticeship* – Engine Reconditioning	*Employer* – Regional Group Training (RGT)	CIT, RGT
3	*Apprenticeship* – Motor Mechanic	*Employer* – Regional Group Training (RGT)	RGT
4	*Apprenticeship* – Construction Worker, Fitout and Finish (Wet & Dry)	*Employer* – Construction Industry Training and Employment Association (CITEA)	CITEA
5	*Apprenticeship* – Construction Worker, Fitout and Finish	*Employer* – ACT Master Builders Association Group Scheme	ACT Master Builders Association Group Scheme
6	*Traineeship* – Course for Pharmacy Assistants	*Broker of training* – Pharmacy Guild of Australia	Pharmacy Guild of Australia (distance learning mode)
7	*Traineeship* – Small Offset Printing	*Broker of training* – Communications, Information Technology and Printing ITAB *(on behalf of CPN Publications, Snap Printing, Pirie Printing and others)*	CIT
8	*Apprenticeship* – Floor Covering and Carpetlaying	*Employer* – Master Builders Association Group Scheme	Master Builders Association Group Scheme
9	*Apprenticeship* – Commercial Cookery	*Broker of training* – Tourism Training ACT	CIT

QUEENSLAND

No.	Title	Client / Broker of Training	Training Provider
1	*Apprenticeship* – Apprenticeship Training Pilot: • engineering (mechanical) • engineering (electrical) • cooking • hairdressing	*Broker* – Training and Employment Queensland	• Brisbane Institute of TAFE • Bremer Institute of TAFE • Yeronga Institute of TAFE • Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE • Gold Coast Institute of TAFE • Logan Institute of TAFE • Moreton Institute of TAFE • Northpoint Institute of TAFE

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

No.	Title	Client / Broker of Training	Training Provider
1	*Traineeship* – State Public Sector	*Employer* – The South Australian Office for the Commissioner for Public Employment	• Various TAFE Institutes • Stones Business College • Prides Business College • Several others to be advised

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

No.	Title	Client / Broker of Training	Training Provider
1	*Apprenticeship* – Engineering Tradesperson	*Employer* – Alcoa of Australia Ltd	• CCI Skills Centre • Rockingham College of TAFE • Thornlie College of TAFE • Midland College of TAFE • South West Regional College of TAFE
2	*Apprenticeship* – Engineering Tradesperson	*Employer* – Chamber of Commerce and Industry of WA	• CCI Skills Centre and a TAFE campus
3	*Apprenticeship* – Engineering Tradesperson (Fabrication)	*Broker* – The Great Southern Group Training Scheme (for two country employers who refuse to send their apprentices to Perth due to travel and time)	• registered providers to be advised
4	*Apprenticeship* – Certificate of Trade Studies Engineering Tradesperson	*Employer* – Western Power Corporation	• Gippsland College of TAFE • CCI Skills Training Centre in WA

NORTHERN TERRITORY

No.	Title	Client / Broker of Training	Training Provider
1	*ATSI Initiatives*– Remote Area Essential Services Operations	*Employers* – • Northern Territory Power and Water Authority • Borroloola Community Government Council (CGC) • Galiwin'ku CGC • Maningrida CGC • Milikapiti CGC • Milingimbi CGC • Nauiyu Nambiyu CGC • Nguiu CGC • Numbulwar – Numburindi CGC	Northern Territory University (Darwin Campus or local training centre)
2	*ATSI Initiatives*– Wild Crocodile Harvesting and Egg/Hatching Care	*Broker* – Wildlife Management International Pty Ltd *Employer* – Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation	Seafood and Maritime Industries Training Ltd.
3	*ATSI Initiatives*– Traineeships in : • office skills • Gardening and horticulture • Mechanical and electrical	*Employer* – Batchelor College	Batchelor College and other registered training provider where Batchelor is not registered
4	*Traineeships* – Course for Pharmacy Assistants	*Broker* – Pharmacy Guild of Australia	Pharmacy Guild of Australia (WA Branch)